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ABSTRACT

This paper studied the relationship between faculty diversity and educational quality, academic integrity, and institutional effectiveness. The study sought to determine if there were significant differences among educational leaders on whether regional accreditation should be used to promote faculty diversity, and what variables accounted for any significant differences that existed. The study used a survey questionnaire mailed to the chief academic officers of 346 four-year colleges and institutions in the Southern accrediting region; 160 responses were received. Eight variables were tested: race, sex, years in academia as an administrator, years as faculty, level of familiarity with accreditation, level of interest in accreditation literature, racial predominance of student body, and private-public institution type. The study found that race of respondent was the most significant factor in whether higher educational leaders believed that regional accreditation should be used to promote faculty diversity. Three tables summarize chi-square data: the first is a cross-tabulation testing the null hypothesis; the second tests the hypothesis against the variable race; the third is a test of the variable racial predominance of student body. (Contains 139 references.) (CH)

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***FACULTY DIVERSITY
AND REGIONAL ACCREDITATION:
CRUCIAL ISSUES AND A SURVEY OF ACADEMIC LEADERS***

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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FACULTY DIVERSITY AND REGIONAL ACCREDITATION: CRUCIAL ISSUES AND A SURVEY OF ACADEMIC LEADERS

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on faculty diversity and regional accreditation. The central issue is whether there is any relationship between faculty diversity and educational quality, academic integrity, and institutional effectiveness since these are the principal concerns of regional accreditation. The paper examines contemporary issues bearing on faculty diversity and regional accreditation. In addition, it presents the results of a survey of higher educational leaders on whether regional accreditation should be used to increase representation and participation of minority persons on the faculty of member colleges and universities.

CENTRAL ISSUES

Several authoritative sources have shown that the worsening rates of attrition, participation, graduation, and overall success of minorities in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) have continued because the educational environments of college campuses, the curriculums, the faculty, the assessment approaches, the culture, the administrative ranks, and other traditional characteristics of PWIs have failed to accommodate the interests and peculiar circumstances of these growing number of minority students.

Furthermore, A major accrediting body was penalized for insisting that an institution which was undergoing reaccreditation should justify its effort in correcting its problem of high rate of minority dropout. The institution had no minority person in key administrative position. The diversity standard of the accrediting body was based on research findings which show that (1) minority students persist and graduate in PWIs with minority members who serve as mentors and role models and (2) minority persons in key administrative positions in an institution make important policy inputs which help the administration to provide more supportive environment for minority students to succeed in the PWIs. There is disagreement among accreditors, educators, and government leaders as to whether it is appropriate to use the powerful influence of regional accreditation to promote racial and ethnic diversity in the faculty of American colleges and universities.

POSTSECONDARY ACCREDITATION

Understandably, accreditation is a unique American model for academic standardization and consumer protection. In the absence of a ministry of education or other form of government or church control as in some other countries, accrediting agencies developed in United States as voluntary associations of postsecondary institutions to serve as an authoritative voice and to provide order, model, public confidence, and leadership for academic quality, institutional effectiveness, and academic integrity among educational institutions. MSA is one of the six regional associations recognized by Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA) to accredit postsecondary institutions in the United States. There are over thirty specialized national associations which accredit different professional units in postsecondary institutions. To command public confidence, these accrediting associations are recognized by CORPA and then the US Department of Education. As the umbrella of all recognized accrediting bodies in the United States, CORPA sets broad policy guidelines for recognized institutional and specialized associations. CORPA has the last word for legitimate and illegitimate practices in postsecondary accreditation. CORPA's recognition is a precondition for Department of Education's recognition of an accrediting association.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose is to find (1) if there is any significant difference among educational leaders in their views on whether regional accreditation should be used to promote faculty diversity in American colleges and universities, and (2) the variables which account for significant differences that may exist.

HYPOTHESIS

On the bases of race, sex, years in academia as an administrator, years in academia as a faculty, level of familiarity with accreditation, level of interest in reading accreditation literature, racial predominance of student body, and private-public institutional type or control, there is no significant difference among higher educational leaders in their views on whether regional accreditation should be used to promote fair representation of minority persons in their faculty.

METHODOLOGY

Instrument: The survey instrument was developed from an extensive review of available literature. After the pretest, the instrument was reviewed by chief executives of two regional accrediting associations who pioneered the diversity thinking in regional accreditation. The sample for pilot test was taken from a four-year public university. The instrument was mailed directly to chief academic officers of 346 institutions.

Sample: Stratified random sampling method was used in selecting the respondents who included the chief academic officers of four year colleges and universities in the Southern accrediting region. Of the 447 four-year institutions affiliated with SACS, only 71 were predominantly black institutions (PBIs). Given their comparatively small number, 100% of PBS in the region were selected. For the PWIs, a total of 275 were selected by a simple random method. Chief academic officers were selected for three major reasons. First, by virtue of their positions in the institutions, chief academic officers have substantial influence on major decisions affecting students of their institutions. Second, they influence major issues, processes, and outcomes of their institutional self-study. Third, they influence the accrediting policies of their regional associations through their attendance, voting, or appointment of representatives in the annual meetings of their regional accrediting commissions.

Data Analysis: Nominal, ordinal, and interval level measures were used in the data collection. The interval measures were later collapsed to ranked categories. Nominal and ordinal data permit the use of Chi-square statistic for significance test. Cramer's V and Lambda scales were used to determine the strength of association among variables that were found significant.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Of the 346 copies of questionnaire that were mailed, 160 were returned. The 46% response rate represented 129 PWIs and 31 PBIs; 81 public institutions and 79 private; 131 Whites, two Hispanics, 25 Blacks, one Asian American, and one other unspecified person of color. These were later collapsed to 131 Whites and 29 nonwhites; 33 females and 123 males; six chief executives of institutions, 111 provosts or chief academic officers, three faculty senate officers, and 35 directors and deputy directors of institutional research. By implication, some of the questionnaire were completed by some other influential

administrators or close associates of the chief academic officers of the institutions but who were not in the sample; their responses were nevertheless useful since the major criterion of ability to influence major decisions of the institution appeared to be satisfied. Race was found to have major effect on the views of educators in five of independent variables studied (table one).

As table one shows, race and racial predominance of student body are the only independent variables that satisfy all the three requirements for rejecting the null hypothesis; other independent variables are in violation of one test criterion or another. The zero p-value for each of the two variables (race and racial predominance of student body) indicates a high probability that the two variables significantly affect the views of educators on whether regional accreditation should be used to promote faculty diversity.

Table two shows the distribution of responses between Whites and nonwhites. The bottom-right corner of the table shows that a total of 160 whites and nonwhites responded to this questionnaire item. Of this 160 educators, 94 or 58.8% do not support the use of regional accreditation to promote faculty diversity; 42 or 26.3% are in support; while 24 or 15% are undecided. Of the 94 respondents who disagree, 91 are Whites and 3 are nonwhites. The table also shows that 77 Whites are expected to disagree if the null hypothesis is true but instead 91 disagree. Consequently, the residual figure shows that 14 more Whites than are expected do actually disagree. Furthermore, 17 nonwhites are expected to disagree if the null hypothesis is true but only three actually do. A residual of -14.0 shows that the number of nonwhites who disagree is 14 less than what the number should be if the null hypothesis is true.

Of the 131 whites in the sample, 34.4 agree that regional accreditation should be used to promote faculty diversity in American colleges and universities. In other words, more Whites than are expected disagree and more nonwhites than are expected agree. Interestingly, in testing the strength of statistical relationship between race and perception of educators on whether regional accreditation should be used to promote faculty diversity, a high score of 0.30 was obtained in the insensitive Lambda scale and a score of 0.57 on the Cramer's V scale. Evidently, the two variables are strongly related. Race significantly affects educators views on the appropriateness of using regional accreditation to promote faculty diversity.

Table 1
Chi-Square and Related Cross Tabulation Values to Test the
Hypothesis: There is no Significant Difference Among Educators
in Their Views on Whether Regional Accreditation Should be Used to
Promote Faculty Diversity in American Colleges and Universities.

Variables	Chisq	P-Value	F_e	Cells	% of Cells
1 Race*	52.63	0.00	4.35	6	16.7
2 Sex	1.11	0.57	5.07	\$	\$
3 Yrs as an administrator.	7.21	0.12	5.39	\$	\$
4 Yrs as a faculty	3.89	0.42	3.57	9	11.1
5 Familiarity with accreditation	3.02	0.55	4.59	9	11.1
6 Interest in reading accreditation literature	13.02	0.04	0.75	12	33.3
7 Racial predominance* of student body	41.29	0.00	4.65	6	16.7
8 Institutional type or control	7.77	0.20	11.85	\$	\$

Note: The dollar sign (\$) shows that the necessary conditions for cells are satisfied. For large tables (tables having more than 4 cells), F_e must be greater or equal to 5 in at least 75% of cells, and F_e must be greater than 1 in remaining cells.

* $p < .05$

Table 2
Distribution of Higher Educators on Whether
Regional Accreditation Should be Used to Promote
Faculty Diversity in Colleges and Universities.
Independent Variable= Race of Respondent.

	Count Col Pct Exp Val Residual	RACE		Row Total
		White	Nonwhite	
Disagree		91 69.5% 77.0 14.0	3 10.3% 17.0 -14.0	94 58.8%
Undecided		21 16.0% 19.7 1.4	3 10.3% 4.4 -1.3	24 15.0%
Agree		19 14.5% 34.4 -15.4	23 79.3% 7.6 15.4	42 26.3%
Column Total		131 81.9%	29 18.1%	160 100.0%

Chi-Square Value: 52.63
P-Value: 0.0000
Minimum Expected Frequency (F_e): 4.35
Cells with Expected Frequency < 5: 1 of 6 (16.7%)
Conclusion: Reject H_0 .
Cramer's V: 0.57
Lambda: 0.30

Similarly, table three shows the distribution of responses between educators in PWIs and those in PBIs. It could easily be noticed that distribution of responses in table two and those in table three are very much identical. This is due to statistical interaction between race and racial predominance of student body. In other words, most Whites in the sample are in PWIs and most nonwhites are in PBIs, so the responses stays basically the same for the two independent variables. In other words, the apparent effect of racial predominance of student body is due to covariance of the variable with race of respondent. Nonetheless, based on the results of this study, it is in order to state that on the basis of race, significant difference exists among higher educational leaders in their perceptions on whether regional accreditation should be used to promote faculty diversity in American colleges and universities.

IMPLICATIONS

The analytical frameworks in sociology and education which the author finds relevant to this study include conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, structural functionalism, and theories of nontraditional education. The first two frameworks are particularly useful in the discussion and understanding of the implications of the findings and the others in framing some recommendations for the practice of regional accreditation and higher education in the United States. The conflict and symbolic interactionism theories in sociology present classic explanation of the findings from this research. From the two theoretical fronts, it appears that educators react to the issue of diversity standards in regional accreditation mainly on the basis of cost-benefit considerations of such a policy goal to them as individuals or as members of certain demographic groups (conflict perspective) and on the basis of the meanings they attach to regional accreditation (symbolic interactionism).

Conflict theorists insist that in all societies, struggle and competition for authority and economic advantage exist between groups and individuals. Clearly, inclusion of faculty diversity as a requirement for regional accreditation would mean that institutions, departments, and component units of member institutions of regional accrediting bodies will make hiring preferences to diversify the faculties that are demographically homogeneous; because most of such hiring will target women and minority persons, whites may apparently feel they are the losers and nonwhites the winners judging from typical American

Table 3
Distribution of Higher Educators on Whether
Regional Accreditation Should be Used to Promote
Faculty Diversity in Colleges and Universities.
Independent Variable= Racial Predominance of
Student Body

		RACE INST		Row Total
	Count Col Pct Exp Val Residual	Majority	Minority	
Disagree		89 69.0% 75.8 13.2	5 16.1% 18.2 -13.2	94 58.8%
Undecided		20 15.5% 19.4 .6	4 12.9% 4.7 -.7	24 15.0%
Agree		20 15.5% 33.9 -13.9	22 71.0% 8.1 13.9	42 26.3%
Column Total		129 80.6%	31 19.4%	160 100.0%

Chi-Square Value: 41.29

P-Value: 0.0000

Minimum Expected Frequency (F_e): 4.65

Cells with Expected Frequency < 5: 1 of 6 (16.7%)

Conclusion: Reject H_0 .

Cramer's V: 0.51

Lambda: 0.26

way of interpreting public policy outcomes. Smith, Wolf-Wendell, Busenberg, and associates (1996) have shown that unavailability of qualified minority persons for faculty positions is a myth.

Thus conflict theorists will see it as natural that Whites who probably feel that they will be excluded from possible benefits of diversity standards will be less likely to support any attempt to implement such standards while nonwhites who feel it will be to their advantage and probably to the society as well will be more likely to support the implementation of such a policy. Stated differently, whites who are the dominant group in the society will prefer that the status quo be maintained because of their advantageous power position while nonwhites, the subordinate groups, will want immediate change since this may help to elevate them to a higher social status in the society. Another possible implication is that Whites may tend to favor meritocracy or a "color blind" policy orientation in faculty hiring, but the central issue is that such a policy option denies minority groups, especially Blacks, the equality of educational opportunity and possible economic rewards for their investment in education. Besides, all too often, merit principles are abused against minority persons even under a system of meritocracy.

From the symbolic interactionists' perspective, it appears the educators do not see the issue from the context of the purposes of regional accreditation but from the point of view of politics as "who gets what", who is the winner and who is the loser; possibly, that is the meaning they attach to it, judging from the findings. Although some members of minority groups may see it from the perspective that faculty diversity is important for increased access and success of minority students, their responses may still be termed political judging from the general pattern of responses. They responded to the questionnaire items based on the meanings they attach to accreditation. However, the findings and the nature of the issue show how little the meaning and purpose of accreditation is understood.

Functionalists' perspective: While conflict theory and symbolic interactionism offer possible explanations of the cause of the controversy on faculty diversity, structural functionalism and nontraditional education theories provide explanations on how things should be. From structural functional thinking, a society consists of interrelated parts that are expected to function interdependently for the survival, continuity, and progress of the system as a whole; to function otherwise is dysfunctional. Obviously, problems of the society such as crimes, unemployment, poverty, increasing welfare spending, illiteracy, and the like affect everybody directly or indirectly; united and constructive efforts for solutions

will benefit individuals and the society as whole. Functionalists likened societies to biological organisms which are made up of a number of parts (or organs) that contribute to the operation of the whole. Like organisms, societies range from simple to complex and are made up of specialized parts, social groups, and collectivities, such as the state, educational system, economic institutions, political institutions, educational institutions, religious institutions, demographic groups, families, and the like. They are interdependent parts, systems and subsystems, or structures of a society, all of which contribute to the survival, stability, and progress of the whole society; when a structure contributes to the integration or adaptation of a system it is said to be functional for the system, otherwise it is dysfunctional. To be sure, component parts of a system may be seen as "structures" each of which performs a special "function" that contributes to the survival and progress of the entire system, hence the term structural functionalism.

The nontraditional education philosophers focus on the issues of contemporary student body that is increasingly diverse in age, sex, immediate educational interest, previous educational preparation, economic and financial conditions, family background and responsibilities, working conditions, distance from campus, physical ability, and other characteristics that are not typical of traditional American college student. In fact, nontraditional education practice represents a true application of one of the fundamental theories of education which states that students are the center of education universe. Just as economists see consumers as the king in relation to theory of demand and supply, students' sovereignty in educational endeavor is final. Educational practice and programs should be tailored to the needs and circumstances of the students. Nontraditional educators have done excellently well in educational programming for adult students. What nontraditional scholars have not emphasized enough is the need to include historically underrepresented racial, ethnic, or cultural groups within the definition of nontraditional students so that educational planning, policy, programs, and processes will appreciate certain peculiarities that compromise their ability to have full benefit of tremendous resources and under-tapped potentials of American higher education system. Diversity issues will continue to be a serious challenge to American system for years and years to come. Accreditors should be leaders of quality in higher education and they should speak with one voice. CORPA should improve over the shortcomings of Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA), its predecessor. The continuous controversy over the connection between diversity and regional accreditation is an indication of lack of effective leadership from COPA and now CORPA.

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